Part 3 – The Early Years – Explorers and whaling
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First European presence

Lieutenant James Cook on board the HMB Endeavour records the presence of the first Europeans along these eastern shores in 1770. Cook’s journal records the discovery and annexation to Britain of eastern Australia:

20 April 1770

At 6 o’Clock shortned sail and brought to for the night having 56 fathom a fine sandy bottom, the Northermost land in sight bore NBE1/2E and a small Island [Gabo Island] lying close to a point on the Main bore west distant 2 Leagues - this point I have named Cape Howe, … At Noon we were in the Latitude of 36°.51’ S and Longitude of 209°.53’ W west and 3 leagues from ye land and Courses saild along shore since yesterday at noon was first N° 52° East 30 Miles than NBE and NBW 41 Miles The weather being clear gave us an oppertunity to View the Country which had a very agreeable and promising Aspect the land is of moderate height diversified with hills, ridges, planes and Vallies with some few small lawns, but for the most part the whole was cover’d with wood, the hills and ridges rise with a gentle slope, they are not high neither are there many of them.

21 April 1770

Saturday 21st Winds Southerly a gentle breeze and clear weather with which we coasted along shore to the northward. In the pm we saw the smoak of fire in several places a certain sign that the Country is inhabited - At 6 oClock being about 2 or 3 Leagues from the land we shortned sail and sounded and found 44 fathom water a sandy bottom; stood on under an easy sail untill 12 oClock at which time we brought too untill 4 AM when we made sail again having than 90 fathom water 5 Leagues from the land. At 6 oClock we were a breast of a pretty high mountain laying near the shore which on account of its figure I named
Mount Dromedary Lat° 36°.18' S° Long° 209°.55' W° / The shore under the foot of this Mountain forms a point which I have named Cape Dromedary over which is a peaked hillock [Little Dromedary].

First contact between Indigenous people and the new arrivals

The first Europeans to come into contact with Indigenous people in this part of the south coast were the survivors of the shipwrecked Sydney Cove in 1797. The ship was on its way from Calcutta to Port Jackson with a cargo for the new colony. The Sydney Cove was one the first ships to be wrecked on the east coast of Australia.

The ship started leaking in heavy seas in December 1796. The leak worsened in continuing bad weather and by 9 February 1797, with water up to the lower deck hatches, the ship's master Captain Hamilton, decided to ground the stricken vessel on an island. This island is now called Preservation Island and is in the Furneaux Group just north of Tasmania. The location was sheltered and everyone was able to get ashore with most of the cargo.

On 28 February 1797 a party of 17 men set off in the ship's longboat to seek help at Port Jackson, 400 nautical miles (740 km) to the north. Bad luck struck again and they were wrecked on the northern end of what is now Ninety Mile Beach in East Gippsland, Victoria. Their only hope was to walk along the shore all the way to Sydney, a distance of over 600 km.
They had few provisions and no ammunition, and some died of fatigue and hunger on the journey north. Along the way they encountered various Aboriginal groups, some friendly, others not. Three men, William Clarke, one European seaman and one Lascar seaman survived to reach Wattamolla Beach, just south of Port Hacking, where they were found by fishermen on 15 May. A plaque at Tathra Park commemorates their epic journey.

Interestingly, as the survivors neared Sydney, they burned some black rock for warmth, and in doing so unwittingly discovered coal in New South Wales. The photo of Sea Cliff Bridge at Coalcliff is the spot where the survivors found coal and burnt their fire.
Sea Cliff Bridge, Coalcliff north of Wollongong
In December 1797 George Bass sailed down the east coast in a whaleboat with a crew of six, on his way to what is now Westernport Bay in Victoria (the city of Melbourne), and entered the mouth of a river – the actual place is a little uncertain.

The following, written by Flinders, is from Bass’s story, *Voyage to Terra Australis*:

*Dec. 17. – The wind having veered to N.N.W., the boat was launched, and proceeded to the southward. Mount Dromedary was passed at eleven; and an island of about two miles in circuit was seen lying off it, a few miles to the eastward: the latitude at noon was 36° 23’. At four the fair breeze died away, and a strong wind, which burst forth from the south, obliged Mr. Bass to run for a gap in the land which had just before been noticed. Here, on a little beach at the mouth of an inlet, across which the sea was breaking, the boat was hauled up for the night. Next morning, the inlet being free of breakers, he entered the prettiest little model of a harbour he had ever seen. Unfortunately it is*
but a model; for although the shelter within be complete for small craft, yet the depth over the bar is too small even for boats, except at high water, when there is eight or nine feet. This little place was named Barmouth Creek, and lies, according to Mr. Bass's computation, in 36° 47' south. The country round, so far as was examined, is rocky and barren near the sea; and towards the head of the creek it is low and penetrated by the salt swamps.

There is some question about the accuracy of the longitude calculation. Bass’s observation of latitude to the east of Mt Dromedary (Gulaga) and later of Cape Howe was fairly accurate, as one would expect of a member of the Royal Navy. The “prettiest little model of a harbour” with a closed mouth at that latitude is, however, Wallagoot Lake, the ancient mouth of the Bega River.

Wallagoot Lake

A number of contemporary accounts interpret this narrative and variously place Bass on 18 December – “well up the Bega River”; “in the Merimbula Lake”; and “up the Pambula River”.

The account continued:

Dec. 19.--At daylight Mr. Bass continued his course to the southward, with a fair breeze. At seven he discovered Two-fold Bay; but unwilling to lose a fair wind, reserved the examination of it for his return. At five in the evening the wind came at S.S.W.; and he anchored under the lee of a point, but could not land. A sea breeze from E.N.E. next day enabled him to continue onward; and at eleven he bore west, round Cape Howe, whose latitude was observed to be 37° 30'. In the evening he landed at the entrance of a lagoon, one mile north of the Ram Head, in order to take in as much fresh water as possible; for it was to be feared that a want of this necessary article might oblige him to discontinue his pursuit at a time when, from the coast being unexplored, it would become more than ever interesting.

The following year 1798, Bass sailed along this coast with Matthew Flinders in the sloop Norfolk on his voyage to circumnavigate Tasmania and thereby demonstrated the existence of Bass Strait.
On the return leg, 9-17 October, they anchored in the bay which he named Snug Cove for the security to shipping it afforded. The Eden Wharf now stands in Snug Cove.

This time the party made a detailed and accurate survey of Twofold Bay (bottom right in the chart below). It was during this survey that Bass and Flinders made their first recorded contact with the local Aborigines. This historic voyage is commemorated by a memorial at the Fisherman’s Wharf off Imlay Street in Eden.
Proving the existence of Bass Strait was extremely important for the new colony. The previous route to Sydney Cove went south of Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) into notoriously stormy seas and up the island’s rocky west coast. Discovering Bass Strait shortened the travel time by weeks and was somewhat safer.

The more efficient use of limited sea power afforded by Bass Strait was vital to the British because of the significant French interest in this southern land. Britain seemed to be in continual state of war with France (1792-1815). In 1800 - 1803 the French expedition led by Baudin was sent to map the coast of Australia. To this day, there are a number of French named places and features along the coast of Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. Encounter Bay in South Australia records the meeting of the Baudin and Flinders expeditions.

Both Bass and Flinders had unfortunate return journeys. On his homeward voyage to England in 1803, Flinders was held as a prisoner of war at Ile de France (Mauritius) for over six years. Bass set sail from Sydney on his last voyage in the Venus on 5 February 1803 and was not seen again. His plan
was to go to Tahiti, and perhaps on to South America. In January 1806 Bass was listed as lost at sea by the Admiralty in England and later that year his wife Elizabeth was granted an annuity from the widows' fund, back dated to June 1803.
Whaling history

During the Industrial Revolution from 1750 to 1850, whale oil became a much prized commodity. It provided lubrication for machinery and was used for lighting, soap and many other minor industrial and consumer products. Sealing and whaling contributed more to the colonial economy than land produce until the 1830s.

The first whaling expedition in Australian waters left Sydney in November 1791. Two ships (William and Ann and the Britannia) captured one whale each. The same captains led a second expedition to New Zealand, returning to England with whale oil and seal skins. One popular product from whales – so-called ‘whalebone’ – was used for a wide variety of purposes including stiffening corsets, collar stays, horse whips and toys and has been described as the ‘plastic’ of the 19th century. Whalebone is a horny elastic material that forms fringed plates in the upper jaw of baleen whales that strain plankton from the water for food.

Whaling in Twofold Bay

Twofold Bay was, and still is, a rare safe haven for shipping along this coast, particularly sailing vessels. In the early part of the 19th century ships waiting in the bay for the weather to improve or for the whaling season to commence, sent their crews to collect bark from the Black Wattle trees that were common in the area. The bark contained tannin which was used in leather tanning. The first recorded shipment of wattle bark from Twofold Bay was in 1821 and until 1953 there was still a bark mill there.

It was not until 1823 when levies on colonial oil entering Britain were removed that whaling rose to commercial prominence in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). The first whaling operations at Twofold Bay were
undertaken by Captain Thomas Raine in 1818 in the *Surry*, a convict transport ship.

![Captain Thomas Raine](image)

Captain Raine founded the company of Raine and Ramsay, general merchants, shipowners and agents in 1822. In 1828 Raine and Ramsay established a shore-based whaling station at Snug Cove, in the town of Eden. Managed by Sydney shipwright John Irvine, the experiment proved very lucrative and before the season was over, around 100 tuns* of oil and 20 tons of baleen, worth £29 a tun and £180 a ton respectively, had been secured. The first shipment of whale products was sent to Sydney on 2 October 1828.

(*The *tun* is an old English unit of wine cask volume holding about 954 litres which is, coincidentally, almost a metric tonne.)

At the peak of the shore-based whaling industry 30 boats operated out of Twofold Bay.

**The Killer Whales of Twofold Bay**

Killer Whales (Orcas) have been around Twofold Bay for thousands of years. While popularly known as Killer Whales they are the largest of 35 oceanic dolphin species. They are much larger than other dolphins, and this size, combined with great strength, makes them amongst the fastest marine animals. They are found in all oceans and most seas world-wide. They have no known natural predators and live on a diet of fish, birds and other marine mammals including seals, sea lions, seals, walruses and other whale species. The Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre features interpretative presentations on the natural history of whale species, including the Twofold Bay Killer Whales. Visit their website at [http://www.sapphirecoastdiscovery.com.au/](http://www.sapphirecoastdiscovery.com.au/).
Killer Whales are highly intelligent creatures that have complex social structures that were utilised by local Aboriginal and European whalers to help them hunt other whales, seals and other marine animals.

Killer Whales feature strongly in the creation stories of the local Katingal (sea coast people). The Katingal believed the Killer Whales, whom they called "beowas" or "brothers", were family members reincarnated in the sea. The natural hunting instinct of Killer Whales of herding and driving prey animals into stranding on beaches delivered an important food source for the local people and reinforced their reverence for the animals. In return the Katingal would offer food to the beowas, calling them with chants and water slapping. Anthropological work reveals that whale meat was an important food source for the local people for centuries, suggesting a lengthy relationship between the people and these animals. Listen to Yuin elder Gaboo Ted Thomas talk about his grandfather being called by the Killer Whales at [http://killersofeden.com/Export9.htm](http://killersofeden.com/Export9.htm)

The first European whalers noted the bond between the Killer Whales and Aboriginal people and it came to play a significant role in the whaling industry in Twofold Bay. The Imlay brothers, among the region's earliest European whalers, found the Aboriginal whalers hard working, reliable and talented, with excellent eyesight and boat-handling skills.

The whalers became familiar with the Killer Whale packs, identifying and naming individuals by their dorsal fins and saddle markings. Whales are still identified in this manner by today's biologists. And so individual whales with names like Hooky, Humpy, Stranger, Cooper, Charlie, Big Ben, Little Ben and many others entered the whaling story. Check out some of these characters and stories online at these two websites: [http://killersofeden.com/Export9.htm](http://killersofeden.com/Export9.htm) [http://www.killerwhalemuseum.com.au/Killers.htm](http://www.killerwhalemuseum.com.au/Killers.htm)

The most famous Killer Whale was Old Tom, recognised by his distinctively tall dorsal fin. In September 1930, after his remains were found floating in the bay, his skeleton was cleaned and reassembled, initiating the establishment of the Eden Killer Whale Museum. Visit their website at [http://www.killerwhalemuseum.com.au/](http://www.killerwhalemuseum.com.au/)
For a scientific study of the social structure of the Eden Killer Whale pod and their interaction with humans, refer to zoologist Danielle Clode's book *Killers in Eden*.

**An expanding industry**

Following Thomas Raine's successful whaling enterprise, a Mr. Staples arrived in 1830 and also a Mr. Sinclair who operated between 1832 and 1835. The first Europeans to pursue the industry on a more consistent basis were the three Scottish-born Imlay brothers, Peter, George and Alexander, who founded their Twofold Bay whaling station in 1832. George controlled their local shore-based whaling interests at a station established in Snug Cove. The whaling station included a house, a store, try works (large pots in a brick furnace), and a wooden pier and blubber-hoisting tripod were erected. A walkway paved with whale vertebrae was an unusual feature of the site.

Across the bay, the Imlays established a second station that was manned almost entirely by Aboriginal whalers, where they proved themselves an integral part of the business. Because of their value to the industry the Imlays paid and accommodated their Aboriginal crews on the same basis as their European counterparts.

By 1837 the Imlays were among the colony's six leading suppliers. With five open boats taking two or three whales a day during the height of the season, their whale oil output was triple the return of the entire New Zealand industry. However, the establishment of Benjamin Boyd's whaling interests in 1843 spelled the end of the Imlays' dominance and the local industry entered an era of fierce rivalry. By 1844, with an estimated 30 boats targeting a declining population, up to 12 crews sometimes pursued a single whale.
Benjamin Boyd (1801-1851) was a London stockbroker with financial interests in steamships who planned to establish an Australian coastal steamship system. He arrived in Sydney in his schooner *Wanderer* on 18 July 1842, preceded by the steamers *Seahorse* in June 1841, *Juno* in March 1842, *Velocity* in May and *Cornubia* in June 1842.

Boyd established coastal shipping between Twofold Bay and Hobart, in Tasmania. In 1843, he bought land at Eden and established Boydtown as his coastal base. From there he could ship livestock, wool and tallow from the Monaro (inland from this part of the coast). At Boydtown, he started building a hotel, a church, houses, a wool store, salting and boiling down works, wells, a jetty and a lighthouse.

Work began on the lighthouse in 1846, using Sydney sandstone, on Honeysuckle Point at South Head. The structure was never commissioned as a lighthouse but used as lookout for whaling. Later, Boyd also established a whaling station at East Boyd using nine whaling ships.

Boyd’s financial fortunes were wiped out in the depression of 1841-45. His properties and his fleet of steamers were sold for much less than their value. By 1849 the enterprise at Boydtown was closed with most buildings unfinished. The house has been restored and operates as a quality
accommodation establishment now called the Seahorse Inn. The remains of the church are heritage listed.

Seahorse Inn Boydtown

Remains of the church at Boydtown

By April 1847 only two seven-man whaleboats were still in use. These could not compete with the five boats employed by the Walkers, who had taken over the Imlay brothers’ financial interests.

Importing the latest boats from Sydney, the Walkers soon provided almost unbeatable competition in a dwindling industry, and Boyd’s open boat numbers declined from seven in 1844 to just two boats by 1847. Boyd left Twofold Bay in 1849.

Falling whale oil prices, due to the emergence of alternative products on the market, slowed the pace of the industry considerably, and in the early 1850s the Walker’s disposed of their Twofold Bay whaling interests. Other whaling enterprises including Barclay, Solomon, Rixon, Falkner, Hibburd, Elliot and Walpole, continued into the 1850s and ‘60s but the returns were significantly lower than those of the previous decade and fewer boats operated.

However, in 1857 the Davidson family, Twofold Bay’s best known whaling family, entered the industry. Alexander Davidson, an immigrant from Scotland who had been one of the carpenters working on the construction of Boydtown, and his son, John, began shore-based whaling with boats and equipment purchased from Barclay and Solomon. They embarked on what would become Australia’s longest running shore station, involving three generations and 21 male members of the family over almost 70 years. Boatsheds and try works were erected inside Kiah Inlet and the family home, "Kiah House", was erected from timbers of the Lawrence Frost, wrecked on Tarargo Point in 1856.
Aboriginal crews formed a vital part of the Davidson workforce, and like the Imlays, they paid their Aboriginal workers the same as their European counterparts. This mutual respect provided the foundation for a lengthy relationship that spanned several generations.

This Davidsons came to revere the Killer Whales in much the same way as their Aboriginal crew members. While others were adopting newer technologies, the Davidsons preferred the ‘old’ way using oared craft and hand harpoons rather than distress the Killer Whales with the noisy explosive ‘bomb guns’ that others were using. Whaling in open boat techniques was a hazardous business, with long hours in cold, blustery conditions and the Davidsons often had to despatch rescue boats to help capsizing whale boats.

The Davidson family maintained their relationship with their Killer Whale ‘partners’ for over 70 years. The family’s special attachment to them is recalled by Doug Ireland and also Alice Otton, daughter of Archer Davidson, on the website [http://killersofeden.com/Export9.htm](http://killersofeden.com/Export9.htm).

Life on land was hard and especially as the Davidsons lived on the south side of the bay. When they needed to go to Eden for supplies, they had to cross the bay which could be treacherous at times. In 1926, while crossing the bay,
Jack Davidson and two of his children were drowned when their boat was swamped. After a search of more than a week, Jack's body was finally found - in the spot where Old Tom the Killer Whale had continued to swim after the tragedy.

Whaling was a seasonal occupation, tied to whale migrations, from June until November. They would take between 10 and 15 whales per season. By the first decade of the 20th century, demand had declined and whaling at Twofold Bay became an opportunistic activity, with no regular watch and scratch crews pulled together at short notice. By 1925, the entire season’s catch was just two whales.

The Killer Whales also started disappearing. Around 1900, between 15 and 20 were known locally, but following the stabbing death of one of their pod, they suddenly left the bay, and the following year, only six returned. Gradually, the Twofold Bay Killer Whales disappeared. The disappearance of the Killer Whales, combined with rising costs and availability of oil substitutes on the market, the Eden whaling industry came to an end in 1929. You can listen to Beatrice Barnett's ABC Radio broadcast on whaling in the bay at http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2010/05/06/2892204.htm?site=southeastns w.

The Davidson Whaling Station is now a Historic Site managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and is open to the public. It is located on the southern shores of Twofold Bay, approximately 35 kilometres from Eden. It provides visitors with an insight into the lives of the whalers and their families. The National Parks and Wildlife Service conducts a Discovery Program with activities during the summer and Easter school holidays. For more information visit http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkHome.aspx?id=N0213.
Davidson Whaling Station cottage, Kiah Inlet